



Kimberly A. Foster  
Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON, VICE CHAIR

## APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **December 3, 2007**, in room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Ann Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Tina Pedersen  
Sandra Rudnick  
Stacey Savelle  
Adelina Sorkin  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the December 3, 2007, meeting was unanimously approved.

### DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Department of Children and Family Services director Trish Ploehn distributed a flyer for a community job fair to be held this coming Saturday in Palmdale (a traditionally difficult area in which to keep staff) to recruit children's social workers and human services aides. Of the 141 human services aide positions that exist department-wide, 82 have been filled. The department's plan is for one aide to be assigned to every two CSWs to focus on family-finding and visitation, arranging for and monitoring the

more frequent visits between children and their parents (and between children and their siblings) that are necessary for successful reunification. Ms. Ploehn believes that no drivers license is required for the human services aide positions, but applicants will need to travel to visitation locations. DCFS avoids office visitations when possible, relying instead on community agencies, homes, and other family-friendly venues.

In looking at the list of workshops being offered at the job fair, Commissioner Kleinberg noted the emphasis on social work positions, and suggested that a 'day in the life of a human services aide' session would also be valuable.

Commissioner Pedersen suggested providing information on job fairs to the National Association of Social Workers to include in its California newsletter or a mass e-mail to all members. Ms. Ploehn said that advertising had been done through that organization in the past, and will check with her recruitment people. One of the hurdles to successful out-of-area recruiting is the cost of living in Los Angeles County, but housing in the Antelope Valley tends to be more affordable than elsewhere.

- An attempt some time ago by Assemblymember Karen Bass to establish a state-level child welfare czar has evolved over the last year and a half into a statewide Child Welfare Council, which is overseen by Chief Justice Moreno and California Health and Human Services Agency head Kim Belshé. The council's 51 appointed members include four from Los Angeles: Ms. Ploehn, Judge Michael Nash, Leslie Heimov of the Children's Law Center, and David Green, a children's social worker in DCFS's adoption division who represents union interests. (This council differs from the blue ribbon body on which Ms. Ploehn and Judge Nash also serve, which is recommending improvements in the child welfare and court systems and will sunset in June 2008.) The Child Welfare Council's first 'get-acquainted' meeting took place two weeks ago in Sacramento; it will next meet in February and quarterly thereafter.

Ms. Ploehn and Judge Nash will be pushing the theme of permanency, developing statewide strategies to keep children in their homes whenever possible and to locate permanent, stable families for them if they cannot stay with their parents. Ms. Ploehn asked for input on other issues that the state may want to tackle, stressing the opportunities the council provides of connecting with very powerful people who can get legislation adopted. She promised to share information as it becomes available.

Preventing homelessness for youth leaving the system is vital, Commissioner Kleinberg said. According to mental health staff at a transitional living program she visited recently, 60 percent of the youth there are homeless, a situation that can overwhelm all other treatment concerns. Temporary beds exist, but may be located in areas that are not convenient to jobs or other services. According to Ms. Ploehn, the contracts for homeless services in process since July should go before the Board of Supervisors tomorrow for approval. Those funds stretch only through June 2009, while U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds are ongoing.

Commissioner Williams asked about refurbishing vacant county properties for housing or other positive uses, but NIMBYism ('not in my back yard') in surrounding neighborhoods, along with a chronic lack of funds, may prevent that. DCFS is currently working with all five supervisorial offices on the rehabilitation of the former MacLaren Children's Center facility to serve as a medical hub for the San Gabriel Valley. Monies are available to create the hub, but have not yet been found for other programs that the facility might also house, such as a preschool, a youth support center, a transitional housing center, a kinship support center, and so on.

- A follow-up presentation on the Auditor-Controller's audit of DCFS procurement procedures will be made as soon as the relevant disciplinary processes are completed—no later than February, Ms. Ploehn said.

#### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

- Commissioners received a flyer on the Pathways to Brighter Futures conference at St. Anne's on January 30, and were asked to let executive director Kim Foster know if they plan to attend.
- Ms. Foster, Vice Chair Worthy-Clayton, and Chair Sorkin attended a recent ICAN conference, the first day of which addressed the multi-agency investigation of child fatalities and severe child injuries that do not result in death. Working collaboratively is still difficult, with each department's unique acronyms and initialisms continuing to be a barrier. A mock team—including District Attorney, police, DCFS, Probation, and hospital staff—demonstrated a hospital-based protocol. Chair Sorkin will provide the conference packet to Commissioner Friedman for her committee.
- At the November 28 Children's Planning Council meeting, the Probation Department presented an update on its progress toward six of the eleven recommendations made in the Council's juvenile justice report earlier this year. Highlights included:
  - ✓ A second Community Corrections Collaboration Conference scheduled for March 17, 2008
  - ✓ Working with clergy to identify mentors for probation youth
  - ✓ Attention to emerging adults, ages 18 to 25
  - ✓ Aligning with the HST prevention initiative and partnering with DCFS

Commissioner Biondi decried the tendency of the Probation Department's reports to be "all in the future." In the year since its first community conference, community capacity has not increased one bit; Probation's overall budget is \$658 million, with only \$4 million of that going to community-based organizations. After 20 months under Chief Robert Taylor's leadership, it will still be next May before the department's evidence-based practices strategic plan goes before the Board of Supervisors for approval—even though quarterly reports on the 100 recommendations made in the program and management audit submitted to the Board in December 2005 show a strategic plan having been completed a year ago. Commissioner Biondi is glad the Commission has taken responsibility for monitoring developments, and she urged

Commissioners to keep the Probation Department's feet to the fire. Commissioner Williams suggested that the Commission ask Probation to report on action items and timelines for two or three critical issues, and Commissioner Biondi recommended continuing to work with the Children's Planning Council to monitor Probation's activities as well.

At the Children's Planning Council meeting, Probation Commissioner Jo Kaplan made a fervent plea on behalf of parents, who she said are begging for help with their youngsters. Commissioner Biondi confirmed that parents at both traffic court and criminal court ask again and again for help, but no resources are available through those courts. With all Probation's talk about needing families, parents are still drug-tested and forced to wait outside in bad weather before they may visit their children in custody, and no family members outside of parents (who may or may not be involved with a given child) are allowed to visit at all.

- The faith-based committee's survey, approved at the last Commission meeting, is scheduled to be distributed to DCFS and Probation offices today. A very active faith-based group exists at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall as a result of efforts by the Youth Law Center in San Francisco, and Commissioner Biondi wants staff there included on the survey list.

Commissioner Williams commended the passion that Commissioners bring to their work, but also cautioned everyone to be respectful of departmental relationships, allowing reasonable timeframes for providing requested information. The turnaround time for responding to the faith-based survey is barely a week in a very busy time of year, and that may be difficult to accomplish.

- At its last meeting, the Commission announced its holiday luncheon at Homegirl Café on December 17, and learned after today's agenda was published that a conference room at the Homeboy Industries headquarters (in the same building) will be available for the regular Commission meeting on that date. **Commissioner McClanney moved that the meeting location for the Commission meeting on December 17, 2007, be changed to Homeboy Industries, 130 West Bruno Street, Los Angeles. Commissioner Biondi seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.** A tour of the Homeboy facility will be given at 11:30, followed by the holiday luncheon.
- Commissioner Friedman clarified with County Counsel's Katie Fesler that a formal Commission letter is not necessary for committees to obtain information from DCFS that is a matter of public record (though committees do need to update the Commission as a whole on their actions).

For the child fatality committee, Commissioner Friedman would like a copy of all protocols in place on the steps to be taken for child fatalities and serious incidents, and to know how closely those protocols are being adhered to in practice. When Paul Buehler was in charge of the risk management section, he updated certain policies—such as allowing social workers to knock on neighbors' doors seeking information

during an incident investigation—but it is not clear to what extent those policies have shifted with his departure, or simply not been implemented in the field. How cases come in, what referrals are made, what research is done, what information goes to the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), and how 30- and 90-day notices are handled—all these procedures may be in flux.

Ms. Ploehn suggested that Jonathan Byers, the current head of the risk management division—which encompasses child fatalities/critical incidents, internal affairs, litigation, and employee health and safety—be invited to make a presentation. Pulling these functions into one division was the first phase of Ms. Ploehn’s work to better manage them, and the second phase, now underway, is to refine their processes. A third phase, planned for next year if approved by the Board of Supervisors, will be to establish an oversight section within the Chief Executive Office to look at child fatalities and serious incidents. (Commissioner Kleinberg asked that the unit’s relationship to ICAN’s investigations also be made clear.)

## **MENTORSHIP PRESENTATIONS**

Mentoring occurs throughout Los Angeles County, and many models having a positive impact on neighborhoods and families are functioning without county support. Commissioner Biondi introduced José Holguin, a case manager at **Homeboy Industries**, the largest gang intervention program in the United States, who told his moving personal story—gang-affiliated family members, a heroin-addicted father dead early on, brought to a juvenile detention center at age 14, a full-blown drug addict himself and facing ten years for attempted murder. What folks forget, Mr. Holguin said, is that if young people don’t have positive role models, somebody will still teach them about life: don’t cry, don’t show weakness, cover the hurt and sadness and anger with drugs.

At age 29, Mr. Holguin considers Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, the only father he has ever known. Father Greg has been in his life consistently for the past 20 years, giving him unconditional love and always acting as a positive mentor. Mr. Holguin was just made a senior staff member at Homeboy Industries—a situation he could never have imagined in his younger years—and mentors at-risk youngsters ages 14 to 18 from gang-affiliated families very like his own.

The peer mentoring model at Homeboy is organic in nature, with matches made by individual choice and ‘feel’ rather than a formal structure with classes and trainings. The commitment can vary in terms of time; Mr. Holguin himself wants to continue knowing his protégés for as long as he’s around, and in turn models himself after other older staff members. Consistency, building trust, and expressing feelings are vital to the mentoring process with these young people, and Homeboy offers a whole array of services that underpin positive changes in their lives, including housing assistance, tattoo removal, job placement, anger management classes, GED preparation classes, and groups on setting and achieving goals. For younger children, gang intervention begins with good parenting, Mr. Holguin believes, and though Homeboy usually does not have young children in its programs, many of its participants are themselves parents.

Michael Ferrera is the executive director of **LifeWorks Mentoring**, a relatively new organization that finds affirming mentors for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth. Mr. Ferrera began his career as a therapist in the group homes run by Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS) and became frustrated watching young people leave that environment unprepared for the world. He and LifeWorks co-founder Garrison Smith saw a decent system of crisis services for GLBTQ youth in Los Angeles, but little that moved them forward proactively once the crisis was past.

The LifeWorks mentoring model emphasizes life coaching and transitions to adulthood. Youth first meet with the director of mentoring to work out short-term and long-term steps toward a life plan based on their goals. Once a mentoring match is made, staff check in with participants every week, ensuring that communication is going well and handling any needed referrals. LifeWorks also offers monthly social activities and a drop-in session on Wednesday evenings with dinner and programs on life skills development and emotional needs, sometimes incorporating career presentations by openly gay professionals. In its two and half years of operation, it has served about 500 youth. In 2008, a tutoring program (in-person, by phone, and online) will be added to focus on high school exit exam preparation and English and math skills, and a free counseling program will begin in cooperation with Antioch University. Future plans include a 2,500-square-foot facility—with a separate computer room, counseling areas, and a kitchen, along with space for after-school programs and a safe place for youth—and a partnership with a catering company for job training and employment.

Right now, the organization asks a year's time commitment of its mentors and has made 40 matches, which is about its capacity. (Mr. Ferrera is interested in working with incarcerated youth, and Commissioner Biondi asked Kim Foster to send him information on several programs for probation girls, recommending Camp Scott/Scudder as a possible place to start.) Its funding sources are all nongovernmental, from fundraising events and individual support, particularly from its active board of directors.

LifeWorks' mentor recruitment process within the GLBTQ community is more formal than that of Homeboy Industries, assessing adults' achievement in education, career, wellness, home, and personal development. Recruitment is done through community organizations, the LifeWorks website and board of directors, booths at gay pride festivals, and so on. Because gay men have few opportunities to give back to youth, more are interested; lesbian women are not as easily engaged, however, and the transgender community tends to be more socio-economically challenged and not as able to respond. Gay and lesbian youth usually opt for mentors of the same sex, whereas transgender youth may choose individuals transitioning from either male to female or female to male, since the process of change is similar.

Suzy Moraes is in charge of the **Probation Department's** mentoring program, which works with placement facilities that want to provide mentoring services. At present, about 25 youth have participated in programs through group homes that include Penny Lane, Florence Crittenton, Optimist Homes, GLASS, and Aviva Center.

Probation and DCFS recently released a joint Request for Proposal (RFP) for four agencies to mentor 800 youth throughout the county. Evaluators are still reading the resulting proposals, and the program is anticipated to be up and running this coming March. It is hoped that mentoring will continue even if agencies do not receive those particular contracts, and the booklet *Hand to Hand: Mentoring the Foster Youth of Los Angeles County*, included in meeting materials, presents the guidelines agencies are expected to follow. Contracted agencies will seek mentors for DCFS children 10 and older who have been in group care for two years or more, and for Probation children 16 and older who are not returning home once they leave placement. (If things change under new permanency rules, Ms. Moraes said, those limitations may be revisited.) Contracts also require group homes to include youth from the community in their mentoring programs, but do not address youth in relative care.

Because of safety considerations, the Probation Department has stringent parameters for its mentors, who must not only meet the same requirements that volunteers with foster children must meet, but also undergo three different criminal justice screenings. Probation reviews and retains all this paperwork—Ms. Moraes is a staff of one—and issues a mentor certificate specifying whether or not mentors may take youth off-site. (If youth have a sustained felony, or 707B offense, they may not leave facility grounds. Commissioner Biondi asked for the numbers of youth with 707B offenses now in suitable placement, as she believes this needs to be looked into.)

In these days of shorter placements, another probation-related issue for mentors is continuing to partner with youth once they leave a group home and return to their communities—often some distance from where mentors have worked with them up to that point. Many mentors don't want to follow their protégés into dangerous neighborhoods, and, too, families may not accept the mentor's involvement in their child's life. Probation is now trying to make sure that these issues are addressed prior to a match, and is also encouraging facility-based academic mentoring. (If a child is promised a year-long commitment from a mentor and the relationship lasts less than nine months, that disappointment is more detrimental than having no mentor at all.) In Inglewood, discussions are underway about an aftercare program for youth at home following probation camp, to help cut down on recidivism.

Housing is often an issue for youth leaving the system, and county dollars from the homeless initiative are now providing rental assistance to youth age 18 to 25 who have had contact with the juvenile justice system, with the hope that it will lead to permanent housing. That initiative is looking for youth to help; of the 70 who have received assistance so far, only two have left before their year was up.

Probation is working with DCFS on research into outcomes and best practices around mentoring, and Commissioners suggested recruiting former foster and probation youth who are now successful adults, perhaps contacting them through the California Youth Connection. AmeriCorps just announced a mentoring program featuring former juvenile justice participants as mentors, Commissioner Biondi said, and will be selecting 30 very

soon. DCFS and Probation encourage county employees to become mentors, but because of the required security clearances, exemptions—like those used for relative caregivers—would be needed for individuals with criminal records, and Ms. Moraes sees that as a time-consuming and cumbersome process. Once youth turn 18, of course, such clearances for their mentors are no longer necessary.

Regional Centers often serve youth in the juvenile justice system, and Commissioner Pedersen asked about mentoring resources for youth with developmental disabilities. The Probation Department will be happy to provide guidelines to Regional Centers on starting mentoring programs, Ms. Moraes said, but someone does need to supervise the matches once they are made.

With regard to the RFP currently in process, Commissioner Williams raised what she views as a drawback to the county's continually awarding contracts to large, well-established agencies (something that First 5 LA also faces). By doing so, it misses out on building the capacity of smaller agencies that may be closer to the community and well able to do the job, but that may lack experience in responding to large bureaucracies. Because of the clearances that are needed for the mentoring program, at least one agency involved must be licensed by the state, but Ms. Moraes said that the county hopes responses will include collaborations with smaller agencies. One of the first programs began in the Torrance area with a group of agencies working on mentoring, and it has been very successful. Commissioner Pedersen asked about technical assistance provided to smaller agencies similar to that offered to community-based clinics by the L.A. Care health plan. This was not done with the mentoring RFP, Ms. Ploehn said, although a bidders' conference is always held at which potential respondents may ask questions. The prevention initiative had entire service planning areas in which no agencies applied, Commission Kleinberg said—a red flag that technical assistance is needed to develop capacity . . . despite that particular contract's stipulation that a certain percentage of its dollars be subcontracted to smaller agencies.

Michelle McKinney from **Public Counsel** spoke of her advocacy work—particularly with homeless prevention—and, as a former foster and probation youth herself, of her passion for helping young people from the system. Most of the referrals her team gets are from mentoring agencies whose clients need help navigating the complicated system of services and benefits available, fulfilling requirements, and following through to sustain eligibility. Mentors can't do everything; they need to know not only about the population they serve, especially victims of abuse, but about making connections to the system. Mentors and foster parents alike can have a difficult time supporting youth if they don't have the proper tools, and they often lose their passion to burn-out and frustration.

The vast majority of Ms. McKinney's clients are youth of color, with about 75 percent being African-American. Their benefits are distributed arbitrarily, they have a hard time accessing resources, and they are often served by agencies with practice issues or needing policy reform. Social workers and independent living coordinators, too, are frustrated about barriers to accessing benefits within their own department. Ms. McKinney sug-



gested that Commissioners hear directly from the advocates serving system youth—in the fields of mental health, independent living, housing, and so forth—to get a well-rounded perspective on what’s happening with them. At least half her clients have mental health issues, and she looks forward to the prevention and early intervention component of the Mental Health Services Act. DCFS could be much more effective with transition-age youth, she believes, if programs could be geared to the mental health services they need.

Commissioner Kleinberg urged Commissioners to determine advocacy points for MHSA planning, especially since it took a huge fight to get probation youth included in the group that could be served by the prevention and early intervention dollars. Meetings are going on now, and the Commission must be at the forefront of advocacy.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**